

## **2000 Annual Report Executive Summary**

### **Southernmost Illinois Delta Empowerment Zone**

During the year 2000, the Southernmost Illinois Delta Empowerment Zone (SIDEZ) began to see results. Organizational development work of the previous year gave way to Strategic Plan implementation. SIDEZ became eligible to utilize EZ grant funds in January 2000. During the year, the zone made forty-five grants totaling \$1,023,000 to non-profit and local governmental units to carry out activities benchmarked in the Strategic Plan. Significant progress was made on achieving the seven priority goals of the empowerment zone. The goals are:

1. Infrastructure
2. Economic development
3. Tourism development
4. Life-long learning and education
5. Stronger unity/sense of community
6. Housing
7. Health care.

Noteworthy accomplishments in improving infrastructure included upgrading 45 miles of gravel roads to oil and chip, expansion of ambulance service from 12 to 24 hours in the Alexander County sub zone and the purchase of a new ambulance by Johnson sub zone. Nine new jobs were created as a result of these activities. Each of the three counties in the empowerment zone hired one new road employee and Alexander County hired six new ambulance personnel with SIDEZ assistance. USDA-Rural Development provided South Water, Inc. \$1,873,300 to extend water to rural areas in the zone.

Economic development success during the year included the establishment of a new \$1,055,000 Intermediary Relending Program (IRP). The zone received a \$750,000 IRP loan from USDA-Rural Development. Pulaski County also established a new revolving loan program with a \$675,000 USDA IRP loan. A fulltime credit counselor was hired with a Rural Business Opportunity Grant from USDA-Rural Development. The counselor assists empowerment zone residents in establishing or repairing credit in order to start a business or purchase a home. The counselor is based at the proposed site of a Small Business Administration One Stop Capital Shop in space donated by the First National Bank in Cairo.

Three industrial sites were purchased with SIDEZ financial assistance and a fourth was being evaluated. A small insurance claims office located on one of the sites in Mounds and constructed a new 5,000 square foot office building. Ten new jobs will be created when the company opens its doors. An expansion on another industrial site in Cairo will result in an estimated 200 new jobs when completed. Thirty new well-paying jobs have already been added. Nine million dollars of empowerment zone bonds will also be used to help with the expansion.

SIDEZ focused on building a stronger sense of unity and community during the year. The zone worked to build pride in the community through clean-up activities, improvements to public buildings, and

strengthening senior nutrition center programs. An empowerment zone grant to the Shawnee Older Adults Program enabled the program to deliver 9,000 additional meals, to assist forty-four additional seniors and to allow outreach workers to visit 188 additional persons.

SIDEZ provided financial support to bring three public buildings into compliance with the American with Disabilities Act. As a result, citizens will have better access to the Pulaski County Courthouse, and village halls in New Grand Chain and Pulaski.

Seven school districts were assisted by SIDEZ to expand after-school, summer, and community educational programming. Some districts used a SIDEZ grant to match a state-sponsored reading program called Summer Bridges. Others established new after-school tutoring, music, art, drama, and computer classes. Several hundred children and families participated in SIDEZ-supported educational programs. Ten youth attended a 4-day summer youth entrepreneurship camp sponsored by SIDEZ in cooperation with the University of Illinois Extension.

Health Care and Housing committees focused on completing needs assessments during the year. Housing volunteers visited 310 households to survey housing needs. University of Illinois Extension assisted in preparing the survey and analyzing the results. Both committees will recommend an action plan to the SIDEZ Board in early 2001.

In addition to the progress made on the seven goals, SIDEZ strengthened its corporate structure, encouraged more grassroots participation and decision-making by sub zones and continued to inform and encourage participation in the empowerment zone initiative. As the Southernmost Illinois Delta Empowerment Zone looks toward the year 2001, it is anticipated that more citizens will take an active role in bettering their communities.

In summary, year 2000 was an exceptional year for SIDEZ. Almost \$16 million in federal, state and local assistance was made available for eligible projects in the empowerment zone. USDA Rural Development alone provided over \$7 million in loans and grants in support of the Strategic Plan. Private investments were encouraged and made in many areas and new jobs were created. The SIDEZ board, committee members and sub zone participants are seeing positive things happening in their communities and can take pride in what they have accomplished.